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ABSTRACT

A preliminary study investigated whether regular periods of sustained silent reading (SSR) would positively affect verified silent reading comprehension scores for eighth grade students. The hypothesis tested was that students allowed 15 minutes of recreational reading (reading self selected material for enjoyment) five times a week for three weeks would show improved silent reading comprehension scores as tested by the Burns/Roe Informal Reading Inventory. Subjects, 18 randomly selected black eighth-graders from a Newark, New Jersey inner-city school, were divided into a control and an experimental group. Both groups were given daily developmental reading instruction, after which the control group spent 15 minutes copying a mathematics assignment while the experimental group was allowed to choose recreational reading material. Results of the pretest and posttest indicated that some of the experimental group gained in reading comprehension and none regressed. Therefore the hypothesis was provisionally supported. Findings showed that both boys and girls appeared to be equally enthusiastic about the program and wished to continue the reading periods beyond the original three week limit. (Tables of data are included, and a review of related literature and references are appended.) (NKA)

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RECREATIONAL READING EFFECTS ON READING COMPREHENSION ACHIEVEMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether daily treatment periods with 15 minutes of sustained silent reading (SSR) for three weeks would positively effect tested silent reading comprehension scores for some eighth grade students. Seven control and eight experimental subjects were randomly selected from a population enrolled in a single self-contained inner-city eighth grade class. Pre and post-test silent reading comprehension ability levels were determined using an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI). Post mean data was reported to reflect a tested 5 month discrepency between the control and experimental sample, with the experimental sample evidencing the greater mean growth.

Mean gains reported for the experimental sample were found to support the stated hypothesis that daily treatment periods with 15 minutes of recreational reading will positively effect tested silent reading comprehension scores. However, the difference between the means was found to have no statistical significance.

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Something in the typical approach to reading instruction seems to foster negative attitudes towards reading-- in effect typical school reading instruction may be conditioning children against reading. Many students heartily dislike reading and only associate reading with unpleasant required tasks. In a survey of 100 poor readers attending Northwestern University Laboratory Research School, Witty (1973) determined that with few exceptions lack of interest in/ an aversion to reading was the principle cause for their reading deficit.

Teaching reading in ways that minimize boredom, tediousness and damage to self-worth is important to all students. J. Holt, author of How Children Fail, noted that even high ability youngsters frequently evidence reading aversion and typically read very few books.

Harris (1970) determined that students appear to lack interest in basal-controlled developmental reading programs currently in operation in about 95% of this nation's classrooms. In a study conducted by Blair and Turner (1973), 60% of 147 middle-grade pupils stated that they did not like the reading materials used by their schools. Only 52% of the 147 thought that developmental reading instruction as taught, had real life-value.

Swanson (1982, found that in a study of 116 rural first graders reading attitudes and reading achievement were positively correlated, especially for blacks. Blaha and Chomin (1981) determined that for 344 inner-city fifth graders Reading as

Direct Reinforcement amd Reading as Enjoyment dimensions merged statistically, supporting the validity of that relationship.

Adult leadership can play an important role in encouraging the reading for pleasure habit. Before becoming involved in a voluntary reading program (Holt 1981), 13% of 52 ten-year olds stated that they had never read an entire book. As a result of the program, all read at least one entire book in the course of one month. In another instance, Higgins and Elliot (1982) reported that low achieving 4th graders involved in a twice weekly uninterrupted sustained silent reading program (USSR), where free book selection was a feature, evidenced improved attitudes toward books and reading by the end of the three month testing period.

Reading is intrinsically rewarding and as such functions as its own best motivational device. When surveyed, 313 third graders listed general enjoyment followed by the chance to learn about new things as their chief purpose for engaging in recreational reading (Neuman 1980).

Findings support the general conclusion that junior high school children have definite opinions about the type of books that they like to read (Carter and Harris 1982). Frequently, adults seem unable to identify teen high-appeal recreational materials. Only 3 out of 24 books recommended in 1980 by the critics in the School Library Journal and Booklist for 6th-8th graders received favorable recommendations by the students themselves (Carter and Harris 1981).

Most children, apparently, can be motivated to read. It appears, also, that teachers who provide time for recreational readin, and who themselves enjoy reading are likely to be instrumental in motivating children to seek enjoyment from recreational reading. It remains to be seen, however, whether limited periods of recreational reading affects comprehension scores as measured by Informal Reading Inventory.

A search of the literature yeilds a paucity of empirical data pertainining to efforts to quantify reading comprehension achievement as improved by actual reading. Yet, during the course of a fifteen year teaching career, the author has repeatedly admonished students to engage in self-directed, or personal reading, on a daily basis, in order to improve understanding of printed material in general.

The underlying and often expressed theory for such urging may be best communicated via allegory: A seasoned athlete, by virtue of his considerable experience, is typically thoroughly cognizant of the essentials of his position; and through repeated performance has mastered requisite motor functions, so as to enable "automatic" correct response as needed. The average novice player suffers through comparison, though his performance can usually be improved in varying amounts commensurate with gained experience.

There is some empirical justification, however, for the assertion that in the area of reading comprehension, as in any other area practice makes perfect (Allington 1977).

For the author the notion that the more one reads the better the reader one becomes has intuitive level appeal as well. The focus of this study, therefore, is to conduct what appears to be a preliminary examination into the area.

HYPOTHESIS

Eigth graders allowed 15 minutes of recreational reading 5 times a week for a combined total of 75 minutes for 3 weeks will evidence improved silent reading comprehaension scores as tested by the Burns/Roe Informal Reading Inventory.

DEFINITIONS

1. Recreational reading: reading in self-selected materials for self-determined purposes-- chief of which might be enjoyment; reading not subject to teacher imposed evaluative criteria.
2. Reading comprehension: the assigned reading comprehension scores determined by the Burns/Roe Informal Reading Inventory (silent reading).

ASSUMPTIONS

1. The test scores used in the beginning and ending phases were correctly determined and represent valid evaluations of the subjects' silent reading comprehension competency levels.

LIMITATIONS

1. The number of students participating in this study was limited to a small number.
2. The Burns/Roe Informal Reading Inventory is not primarily designed to measure silent reading comprehension alone.
3. The Burns/Roe Informal Reading Inventory allows for a degree of subjectivity in scoring.

DELIMITATIONS

This study derives its data from research conducted with the eighth grade students enrolled in Room 313 of Newton Street School-- Newark, New Jersey, only. Findings should not, therefore be extended to other populations.

PROCEDURES

This study was designed to involve experimental sample subjects in a daily fifteen minute period of recreational reading. The treatment lasted for three weeks, from February 1. 1987 until February 21, 1987. During that time, control and experimental samples received equal amounts of developmental reading instruction. In addition, the examiner kept a log detailing material read by each experimental subject. Prior to treatment, silent reading passsages of the Burns/Roe Informal Reading Inventory-- Form A, was administered to all participants to establish initial levels of independent-level silent reading comprehension. At the end of the three week treatment period, Form B of the Burns/Roe IRI

was then administered to each participant as a post test, so that the effect of the treatment might be assessed.

Description of Sample

Eighteen subjects attending one of Newark, New Jersey's inner-city public schools were used in this study. The examiner's own self-contained class was used exclusivel. Students ranged in age from 12 years and 4 months, to 15 years and nine months. The median age however, was 14 years and 3 months. All were black. In addition, 15 of the 18 participants reported living in subsidized housing.

Although the population was quite small, the examiner determined that assignment to control and experimental samples would be based on a table of random numbers. Subsequently, the total population was therefore numbered serially. The 9 member control and 9 member experimental populations were then determined on the basis of the table of random numbers.

Ten minutes before dismissal for lunch, the control sample was directed to copy a math assignment from the board. The math assignment wpuld later be completed independently during the experimental treatment period-- the last 15 minutes in the school day. As the control population copied, experimental sample subjects made selections from the reading material available in a special library corner. These materials would then be logged with the examiner. The material selected was to be used later in the recreational reading period for that day. Exchanges were not permitted until the

next day's selection of materials period.

During the last 15 minutes of the school day, experimental subjects read from self-selected recreational reading materials while the control subjects independently completed review math work. No talking was permitted in the room. In addition, the examiner/ teacher read conspicuously, from recreational-type material/(s).

Selection and Administration of Test

The requirements of this study dictated the use of a silent reading comprehension test, having at least two equivalent forms and a capability of discriminating independent silent reading comprehension levels. The Burns/ Roe IRI was used because it met the necessary requirements as listed above. It has four forms and provides for shortening the usual 30 minute administration time. The authors of the IRI suggest that both silent and oral reading passages as well as graded word lists be administered to each subject, they do however, allow for the use of the IRI in abridged form. The shortened test can be administered to an individual in under fifteen minutes.

The Burns/ Roe IRI is easy to score. Correct answers and percentage figures were printed on the examiner's record sheet as was a reproduction of the passage read silently by the subject. Responses were immediately scored correct (+) or incorrect (0).

Testing was conducted in the school auditorium. At a time when the area was not in general use, participants were assembled in the rear of the auditorium. They were supplied with required academic work which they had been directed to complete independently. Talking was pointedly discouraged. Individuals were called from the rear to the front of the large area where actual test administration took place. Appropriate furniture-- a standard sized desk and two chairs were arranged in the front of the auditorium under an adequate bank of lights.

The teacher/ examiner kept a record of each response produced and followed test administration instructions as provided in the IRI manual.

Post-Test of Silent Reading Comprehension

At the conclusion of the three week treatment period, every participant in the study was administered the Burns/ Roe IRI-- Form B by the same teacher/ examiner. The Pre-test procedure as described earlier, was strictly adhered to. As was the case before, once again the school auditorium was the testing site.

The Reading Log

During each daily material selection period, experimental subjects were required to provide the teacher/ examiner with the title of their choice for that particular day's treatment period. A permanent record of all such data was kept by the

teacher/ examiner:

Student	Title	Out	In
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			

DATE _____

IRI Response Sheets

During both pre and post testing, the teacher/examiner recorded inidvidual subject response verbatim using an ordinary lined note paper. One sheet per passage was the rule. The response sheets combined with IRI-provided question classification information, facillitated analysis of subject error. The IRI offers all of the following types of questions in each graded passage, regardless of the level of passage difficulty: main idea, sequence, inference, vocabulary, detail and cause and effect.

Experimental Methodology

Teacher Orientation

Since the study was initiated, designed and conducted by

the subjects' classroom teacher, a teacher orientation component was not built into the design of the study. It was necessary however, to secure approval from the school's principal.

Treatment of Data

IRI's were hand scored, producing individual independent silent reading levels. Using these scores from the pre and post-tests, the mean gain for both the experimental and control sample was then determined. A t test was performed on the post-test mean gain data to determine if experimental subjects experienced greater gains in silent reading comprehension than did those members of the control sample.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A comparison, as shown in Table I, of experimental and

Table I

A COMPARISON OF THE MEANS FOR THE BURNS/ROE INFORMAL READING INVENTORY: PRE-TEST INDEPENDENT READING LEVELS FOR THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL SAMPLES

SAMPLE	M	SD	t	LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE
Control	4.6	.88	.12	No significance
Experimental	4.5	1.06		

Degrees of Freedom 15

control pre-test means of independent reading comprehension levels indicates that, because of random selection prior to treatment, both samples demonstrated basically equivalent mean reading comprehension ability levels.

Post-test mean data as detailed in Table II indicates the

Table II

A COMPARISON OF THE MEANS FOR THE BURNS/ROE INFORMAL READING INVENTORY: POST-TEST INDEPENDENT READING LEVELS FOR THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL SAMPLES

SAMPLE	M	SD	t	LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE
Control	4.4	1.13	.75	No significance
Experimental	4.9	1.25		

Degrees of Freedom 15

existence of a tested five month discrepency between the control and experimental samples after treatment scores, the experimental sample evidencing greater mean growth in independent reading comprehension.

Despite apparent experimental mean gain findings, both pre and post-test t test results show no statistical significance.

In considering the statistical summaries for the experimental and control samples' silent reading comprehension performance scores, prudence dictates an analysis of affective

and other factors which may have exerted varying degrees of influence over the summary findings. Consider the data reported in Tables III and IV below.

Table III

BURNS/ROE PRE AND POST-TEST INDEPENDENT READING LEVELS FOR CONTROL SUBJECTS

Pre-test	Post-test
6	6
5	5
5	5
4	4
4	4
*5	*4
5	5
*3	*2

Table IV

BURNS/ROE PRE AND POST-TEST INDEPENDENT READING LEVELS FOR EXPERIMENTAL SUBJECTS

Pre-test	Post-test
3	3
*6	*7
*4	*5
4	4
5	5
*4	*5
4	4
-	-

Two control subjects appeared to suffer a regression in tested comprehension levels. Probable causation for regression as exhibited herein may be ascribed to the expectation fulfillment experienced by susceptible control subjects. Based on the students' perception of instructor expectation, actual performance may have been adversely affected in a kind of reverse halo effect. The subjective nature of the testing tool could have been a factor in apparent regressions, as well.

Experimental gains as reported may be ascribed to affective factors as well. The three experimental subjects exhibiting tested comprehension gain may have been responding, again,

to their perception of instructor expectation.

Analysis of post-test experimental subject scores indicates an absence of regression. Five of the eight experimental subjects tested at the same level of competency after treatment as they had tested prior to treatment. Three, as noted above, exhibited tested comprehension gain.

A further consideration in interpreting experimental subject's after treatment data, is the fact that increased amounts of reading occured beyond the treatment periods as a possible result of the realization of the intrinsically rewarding nature of reading, arrived at as an incidental by-product of treatment. An attempt to measure the "extra" reading was not, however, part of the design of this research.

In general, both boys and girls most frequently selected paperback/ periodic materials in preference to hard-covered texts of equal or lesser length. Selections seemed stereotyped. No girl ever read Sports Illustrated, for instance, whereas, no boy ever selected Red Book or teen romance books with masculine-appealing titles and cover illustrations, etc. (See Table V below).

Table V

PREFERRED READING MATERIAL AS DEDUCED FROM DAILY LOG DATA

MOST READ	
Girls	Boys
J. Bloom-- B. Cleary books	Newspapers
Romantic novels	Adult-intended magazines (Sorts Illustrated, Time Magazine, etc.)
Adult-intended magazines (Red Book, Jet, Women's Day, etc.)	Classic literature
Miscellaneous types	Miscellaneous types
LEAST READ	

CONCLUSIONS

Good or classical literature was not popular with either boys or girls. Even attractive comic book versions, judging by log entries, seemed to lack appeal.

Reading selections were restricted to male/ female stereotypical categories. Boys read what they perceived to be boy-type items.

Both boys and girls appeared to be equally enthusiastic about the program and desired to insure the continuance of the treatment periods beyond the limits of the three weeks

designated for the course of the experiment.

Based on experimental and control post-test data it is possible to infer, provisionally, that increased amounts of recreational reading can be a factor in effecting tested comprehension gain in some eighth grade students.

Mean gains of the experimental sample tend to support the stated hypothesis that daily treatment periods of 15 minutes of recreational reading will positively effect tested silent reading comprehension scores, though, as seen here, utilizing a Reading Inventory the difference between the means was not significant.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

An attempt to determine to what degree student-perception of instructor expectation influences actual student performance is an investigation that seems warrented due to the unexpected regressions experienced by two control subjects, but not by a single experimental subject.

Determining the most effective way(s) to transmit/ signal expectation may also prove useful. Enhancement of learning, rather than impediment to learning could then be better regulated.

RECREATIONAL READING EFFECTS:

RELATED LITERATURE

RECREATIONAL READING EFFECTS:

RELATED LITURATURE

The literature contains few rigorous research studies that directly pertain to the relationship of recreational reading as an index of improvement for reading comprehension subskills to see how they individually and in concert affect reading comprehension.

Davis (1944) isolated nine subskills basic to reading comprehension: word meanings, context, identification of antecedents, main idea, literal understanding, inference, literary devices, author's purpose and paraphrasing (Gentile 1983).

The following is offered in an effort to elaborate. Davis felt that students needed each of these skills. Word knowledge-- for it is basic to reading comprehension; any attempt to improve comprehension must give scope to vocabulary-building. The ability to infer meanings-- to see relationships of ideas as well as to be able to focus on ex;plicit/ literal information as presented in text, using context clues, whether syntactic or semantic, to determine unknown words or to assign the correct word meaning as used in a particular passage; the ability to follow the passage organization and to identify antecedents and their referents; and the ability to synthesize meanings/ summarize what was read, are each slightly expanded explanations of Davis' nine comprehension subskills. They provide greater insight and allow for an improved ability to elevate the direction of his inquiry.

Davis theorized that the "component skills" listed, were

relatively independent of one another. It was for that reason perhaps, that he suggested that these seperate skills be taught independently as determined by the individual student's need.

Davis advocated the development and use of workbooks to aid in improving student's abilities in the nine component areas. The proliferation of "skills building" exercises and workbooks geared to Davis' component skills, attests to his persistent influence on school reading programs.

Obviously, some would argue with Davis that instruction in each of the listed areas is the best way to insure improvement in reading comprehension. The author, however, cannot help but wonder whether the Mark Twains of an earlier era gained their ability to comprehend through some other means. Did they in fact learn to read with improved understanding through the agency of reading for the sake of reading?

Can the practicing of skills in "bits and snatches" of workbooks and worksheets, if not balanced by adequate amounts of real-life reading experience lead to effective total reading (Reed 1977) ? Perhaps students need sufficient oppurtunity to apply these skills in actual context during silent reading of books, articles or stories.

Teachers may have lost sight of the primary goal of reading instruction-- understanding. It seems a bit peculiar to argue for the need for increased reading, yet the trend for portraying learning as a hierarchical series of small steps has somehow made the argument necessary (Allington 1977).

Consider Durkin's 1978 research into the area of reading comprehension instruction. One purpose of her study was to determine whether elementary schools did in fact provide any comprehension instruction, and if so, to what degree and of what quality.

For the purpose of her study, comprehension instruction was defined as what the teacher did or said to help children understand or work out the meaning of more than a single isolated word. Altogether Durkin identified 8 kinds of teacher behavior that might be expected if comprehension is to be taught. Instruction, review of instruction, assignment, help with assignment, preparation for reading, assessment and prediction were identified behaviors.

Using the criteria listed, Durkin observed three normally functioning classes in three different schools. Each of the three schools was credited with offering different but thoroughly sound instructional programs as pertained to reading. Durkin determined on the basis of her research data, however, that none of the three offered comprehension instruction in what could be considered even marginal amounts.

Very little actual instruction, as defined, occured. Instead she found that the teachers who had been observed, were more accurately described as mentioners, assignment-givers and checkers and interrogators rather than instructors of comprehension. They typically would mention the skill to be taught, provide two-three examples-- insufficient to the purpose of instruction and then proceed to assign the work sheet/ work-

book page/ etc. Questions (interrogation) always followed.

After the initial word recognition skills have been acquired during primary instruction, does the acquisition of higher level reading skills depend principally on isolated skills instruction? In an effort to pursue that very line of thought, the author turned to a survey of Thorndike's classic study.

Thorndike (1917) analyzed answers 200 eleven-year-olds offered in response to his questions about a brief passage. His stated purpose was to prove that:

> reading is a very elaborate procedure involving a weighing of each of many elements in a sentence, their organization in the proper relations one to another, the selection of certain of their connotations and the cooperation of many forces to determine final reasons.

Thorndike posed seven questions of his young subjects based on the following:

> In Franklin, attendance upon school is required of every child between the ages of seven and fourteen on every day when school is in session unless the child is so ill as to be unable to go to school or some person in his house is ill with a contagious disease or the roads impassable.

Although he asked seven questions, he analyzed only four in detail:

1. What is the general topic of the paragraph?
2. On what day would a ten-year old girl not be expected to attend school?
5. What kind of illness may permit a boy to stay away from school even though he is not sick himself?
6. What condition in a pupil would justify his non-

attending school?

The subjects' errors fell into three main categories; failure to note the provisional character of ideas as presented, over-potency/ under-potency and improper word meaning associations based on schemata.

In general Thorndike felt that he had demonstrated that:

> A mind is assailed, as it were, by every word in a paragraph. It must select, repress, soften, emphasize, correlate, and organize, all under the influence of the right mental set or purpose on demand.

Based on this study one might conclude that Thorndike identified two basic reader-types-- the "text-based" and the "schemata-based" types.

Text-based readers concentrated almost exclusively on what was presented. They subjected the text passage to intense scrutiny in an effort to locate details. It is possible that this type of reader missed less obvious inferential understandings.

Those who concentrated on the gist or overall meaning, could be described as schemata-based readers. They often were seen to have missed the majority of significant detail, but could usually infer with greater frequency. Thorndike reported that this type could usually apply what was read to "real-life" situations.

In addition, some pupils were found to believe that because they could correctly decode each word from the passage presented, that their ability to comprehend it must also be perfect. Frequently, Thorndike found this not to be the case.

Thorndike's study as discussed here was first presented over 60 years ago. Attempts to replicate his findings have been corroborative (Nicholson 1982).

Allington (Gentile 1983) identified nine other possible sources for wrong response as given by subjects in Thorndike's original study, and subsequent other replication studies. It is to be remembered that Thorndike discussed only three such causes.

Allingron thought that the following were likely factors that needed to be considered:

1. Word pronounciation
2. Word meaning difficulty
3. Sentence complexity
4. Text ambiguity
5. Inadequate prior knowledge
6. Inappropriate utilization of prior knowledge
7. Inability to call up prior knowledge
8. Lack of motivation
9. Inappropriate text processing strategies

It would appear that the implications of Thorndike's study have been grossly misunderstood, leading to practices that are inconsistent/ unrelated to his findings. Currently there is an emphasis on comprehension testing through questionings of various types. Little is done, to foster understanding, which could be argued, was the actual point to Thorndike's research (Pearson 1978). His research has withstood the test of time and is currently considered to be consistent with recent re-

lated research findings (Nicholson 1982).

Thorndike's work reveals very little about the impact of reading on comprehension-- which is the actual focus of this research effort. Is inductive instruction the most significant factor in the mastery of the complicated process that Thorndike described?

Reading theorists sometimes speak of automaticity when describing skilled and unskilled readers. Automaticity could be adequately defined using descriptions of achievement typical of the three stages thought to mark a learner's progress toward automaticity.

In stage one the learner devotes a great deal of time and energy to decoding tasks. Conscious effort is required to decode yet many errors are made. Memory is strained as the reader handles decoding and meaning assignation as two seperate operations. Little if any comprehending of text results. Stage two reading is characterized by accurate decoding but little comprehension.

The conscious effort needed for decoding and the inability to simultaneously decode and assign meaning which characterized stages one and two, are not features of stage three readers. In the third and final stage, the reader is thought to perform decoding and meaning assignation simultaneously, without conscious effort. He attends to large rather than small units of passage/ text (Gentile 1983).

Theorists propose that when beginning readers "call words" -- decode accurately, but have little conception of what the

import of the text read was, that they are displaying stage two characteristics. Energy is being consumed on decoding, greatly inhibiting the ability to comprehend.

If automaticity is a desired end of reading, then perhaps Safran's article (1986) which suggests that between 3½ and 4 hours of reading per week are necessary to produce automaticity, is of especial note. Based on Alan Rossman's studies (Northwestern University) she concludes that the amount of time that a youngster spends in recreational reading, or total reading is what will ultimately determine automaticity.

Even effective teachers may experience an uncomfortable degree of chagrin when despite their best efforts, students fail to show expected test-score gains. Efforts obviously are not realizing the full potential of many students. There appears to be a need to supplement the traditional basal approach (Kochinski 1980).

The practice of allowing students to choose desired reading material which could be then read in school for specified, regular amounts of time, may be just such a looked for supplement. The approach is often referred to by a variety of names. Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR) and Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) are the two most common ways of discussing the process, however.

Basically USSR and SSR programs call for systematic structured school time in which participating students are encouraged to read books that they themselves have chosen. The students are not asked to answer questions or to complete

book reports for the readings.

In 1970 Hunt fully described his concept of USSR in an article discussing the influence of interest and motivation on reading development. He is credited as being the author of USSR.

The SSR/USSR approach has several important advocates. Oliver, McCracken, Petre, Mork and Allington, to name a few, are in favor of the approach (Summers 1979).

In recent years SSR and its various related forms, have been applied in a variety of educational institutions, and have been described in textbooks as well. (Flynn 1980).

To make these programs succeed the teacher also reads, serving hopefully, as a model that the students will emulate.

In this way, reading ability is expected to improve, for few can learn to do anything well without the oppurtunity to engage in the skill/ material taught.

Advocates make many claims for SSR/USSR. Flynn (1980) listed the following:

1. Recreational reading is an excellent way to help children see themselves as "readers".
2. Students are better able to identify appropriate print materials sufficient to their needs.
3. A supportive reading atmosphere is created.
4. Students become familiar with the many varieties of linguistic structures.
5. SSR/USSR promotes the development of useful and varied reading strategies.

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6. The approach results in improved reading comprehension.
7. Readers internalize forms and strategies when they read and the internalization process results in language development.
8. The method is cheap-- it requires no special equipment; requires no new personnel or retraining of existing staff.
9. Students are afforded an oppurtunity to practice skills that are necessary to become an active voluntary reader.

Conflicting data is reported as pertains to sustained reading. Flynn in her 1980 research paper entitled, "Reading Theory and the Basic Writer" reported that on average reading comprehension gains were about one year for students who participated in 7.3 forty-five minute sustained reading sessions over a period of just ten weeks. Members of the control sample, though, over the same period of time demonstrated about two months of gain on average.

A great many examples of current research fail to bear out the glowing claims proffered by the advocates of sustained reading programs. Kochinski (1980) summed up the negatives as follows:

1. Sustained reading programs have failed to consistently show significant differences in reading achievement.
2. Reading achievement in sustained reading programs can at best, be described in only qualitative terms.

3. Increased sustained reading has not resulted in consistent improvement of reading comprehension test scores.
4. Sustained reading studies have been characterized by inference and a lack of statistical evidence.
5. Insufficient empirical data exists to provide a thorough evaluation of the sustained silent reading process.

At best Kochinsky maintains, SSR can be empirically shown to not adversely effect reading achievement.

Caution must be exercised in assuming that there is a strong relationship, or for that matter a weak relationship between reading achievement, liking for reading and the amount read, as pertains to any one individual, although the three may be related. Also, to conclude that good readers must be avid readers may, too, be based on a faulty assumption (Summers 1979).

Procedures for measuring reading comprehension have been the subject of much investigation. Killgallon's landmark study (Gentile 1983) gave rise to the ever popular Individual Reading Inventory. Critics may question the terms instructional and frustrational, but few would argue that there are behavioral changes that can be readily discerned and that clearly distinguish the two levels. The conclusive data for Killgallon's study does not help to determine the relationship of reading more on reading comprehension improvement.

The very nature of the printed material itself-- its com-

plexity as affecting comprehension-- has come under stringent scrutiny as well (Gentile 1983). Readability formulas, once held to be reliable measures capable of producing the optimum match of student comprehension ability with appropriate reading material, have come under fire. Despite recent advances such as the cloze procedures, linguistic contributions, data processing techniques, etc. readability formulas to date, have proven to be of doubtful value.

Access to/ availability of printed material (Bartlett 1980) and display considerations (Heins 1980), enthusiastic adult models (Sauls 1974), individual reading tastes (Higgings and Elliot 1981), etc. are areas that have been researched and attempt to get at the best way to foster reading and reading comprehension improvement.

Whether the dearth of empirical inquiry into the effect of recreational reading, as an aid to improving reading comprehension is reflective of a lack of feasibility, is a consideration that the author has pondered seriously. The author's own deeply rooted intuitive conviction, based admittedly on principally experiential level observations, argues for the merit of this line of research. Reading should improve reading, despite the lack of empirical data.

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